Director's Perspective

PIX14353

Dr. Dan Arvizu

These are exciting times for those of us fortunate enough to work in the field of renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Never before have we witnessed such intense interest in—and rapid growth of—renewable energy and efficiency technologies. In particular, the industries for solar, wind, and biomass energy systems are expanding at rates exceeding 30% annually.

And yet, as the drive to commercialize existing technologies reaches new heights, there has never been a greater need for the innovative research that will be required to deliver subsequent generations of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies, to make tomorrow's energy solutions more economically and environmentally beneficial and less costly than those available today.

President George W. Bush's visit to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) in 2006 underscored the important role the laboratory is playing in moving our nation toward a more secure and more sustainable energy future. That the president chose the NREL campus as the locale for a "national dialogue" on energy issues made it clear that our work can indeed make a difference for the United States.

This past year also saw NREL being recognized for its leadership in reducing the environmental impacts of its facilities and operations. Our Sustainable NREL program has not only employed renewable energy to offset the total energy use of our buildings, but also the energy used by NREL vehicles, employee commuting, air travel, and other "life cycle" energy consumption as well. I am proud of our commitment to "walk the talk," by putting to productive use many of the same renewable energy and energy efficiency concepts and systems we have had a hand in developing over the years.

I'm pleased to say that our evolving plans for the "build out" of the NREL's research campus—ensuring that we have the new laboratories and other facilities our work will require over the next several decades—reflects that same commitment to minimizing our organization's energy and environmental footprint.

A key example of this commitment is NREL's new Science and Technology Facility. As this publication was about to go to press, the facility was certified as the first federal building to earn LEED Platinum from U.S. Green Building Council. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, and Platinum is the highest rating under the LEED Green Building Rating System.

As we look to the future, it is becoming clear that our nation must increasingly rely on the useful innovations that can only come from research if we are to continue to thrive. Fittingly, a report recently released by the Council on Competitiveness advises: "For the next quarter century, we must optimize our entire society for innovation."

Putting innovation front and center: that's the philosophy on which this laboratory was built, and it is the spirit that underlies what we strive to achieve here every day. Our mission at NREL has never been more relevant, and our work never more consequential, than it is today. ■